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Chapter:	Planning With Children and Families	
Subject:	Family Time	Page 1 of 5
Approved:	Cynthia K. Walcott, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 2/17/2015 FINAL
Supersedes:	Policy 124 Family Visiting	Dated: 2/17/2015

Purpose

To establish division policy on parental and family contact between children and youth in care and people who are important in their lives and to provide general information on family time.

Introduction


Frequent, supported family contact is essential to maintaining attachments, thus reducing the child's sense of abandonment and contributing to safe, successful reunification.

Definitions

Family time is face to face parent-child, kin, sibling, and/or contact with others who are important in the life of the child/youth.

The Initial Caregiver Meeting is the first time that the social worker, parent and kin/foster parent (and family time coach if there is one) is able to share information about the child/youth and develop a schedule for family time. Because it is an opportunity for those caring for the child to begin to develop their relationship other participants should be limited.

The Shared Parenting Meeting is a time for the social worker, parents, kin/foster parent, and sometimes the child/youth and other family members as appropriate, to sit down and review and further develop the plan for family time as well as continue to deepen the relationship between those caring for the child. If a Family Time Coach is working with the parents, it is necessary for them to attend. This meeting is convened by the Family Time Coach if there is one. If there is not a Family Time Coach then the meeting could be convened by a family meeting facilitator, Resource Coordinator, supervisor and/or social worker. This is not a time to review progress towards case plan goals or to discuss a decrease in family time. It is a time to focus on child needs. It is important for the child/youth's voice to be present at the meeting. If he/she cannot attend in person then other ways for his/her wishes to be known should be developed (letter, on the phone, ect..) Those that participate in Shared Parenting Meetings are responsible for the day to day care of the child (past, present and future).

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The Family Time Plan is developed at the Shared Parenting Meeting outlines the logistics of family time.

Family Time Coaching, developed by Marty Beyer, Ph.D. is a primary intervention model for family time to facilitate reunification or other permanency planning. It provides parents with the opportunity to become more confident in recognizing and responding to their children's needs.

Supervised Visitation Programs exist throughout the state. They offer enhanced safety procedures for family time and when monitoring is necessary for when children arrive and leave the visit.

Supported Family Time refers to family time where the parent and child are assisted by another person, such as a coach, a family friend, relative, ect..

Unsupported Family Time refers to time that the parent spends alone with the child. The parent may be assisted to plan this time and there may be a check in after the family time to assess how it went and plan for next time.

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Policy

The Division supports the use of Family Time Coaching as the primary method of maintaining, strengthening or developing relationships between children and their parents when it is necessary to build parental capacity to meet children's needs. When this is not the case, the social worker and the supervisor will explore the appropriateness of supporting family time without a Family Time Coach or a monitor. Consideration will be given to the extended family, friends, community supports helping to support family time. It is also important for parents to continue to be involved with medical and dental appointments as well as attending school meetings or events when this can be done safely.

It is important social workers ensure family time is a well planned activity that occurs as soon as possible when a child enters out of home care. This is important because a child that is removed from his/her home faces a new risk, the emotional and developmental harm that can result from separation. Maintaining and strengthening attachments are critical to a child who is separated from his/her family.

Vermont Family Time Guidelines can be found at: <http://intra.dcf.state.vt.us/fsd/practice>

Recommended Practice Timeframes


The initial family time should occur within three working days of the child/youth's placement assuming individual planning for special circumstances have been addressed if necessary.

The Initial Caregiver Meeting should occur within five working days of the child/youth's placement or a change in placement and a Family Time Plan should result from this meeting. A copy of the plan should be provided to all attendees and submitted to the court.

The social worker will participate in one family time session per month. This provides the parent with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to meet the child's needs.

Contact with family or other people important to the child/youth will never be used as a reward or punishment.

The Family Time Plan should be reviewed and updated at least every three months although it is preferable to do it more frequently – monthly is best practice. A Shared Parenting Meeting is the preferred way to conduct this review and continue the development of the

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relationship between the parents and foster parents. This meeting is between caregivers facilitated by a family centered meeting facilitator through the Child and Family Support Contract if there is no Family Time Coach. Social Workers may also bring caregivers together to discuss the family time plan. Notes from Shared Parenting Meetings should be shared with attorneys, GALs or others involved in the care of the child/youth such as a contracted case manager so they are kept informed as to what is happening at the meetings and in family time unless counter indicated.

Situations that Require Special Considerations

There are many family time circumstances that require individualized planning. The Vermont Family Time Guidelines outline special considerations in situations where families and social workers are confronted with the following:

- Involving absent parents/extended family
- Domestic abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Incarcerated parents
- Parents in a treatment facility
- Safety concerns
- Termination of parental rights/goodbye contact


Social workers are expected to address these during the family time planning process.

In situations of extreme trauma resulting from experiencing abuse or violence, therapeutic contact between a child and an offending parent may be necessary. See Appendix A in the Vermont Family Time Guidelines for assistance.

Supervised Visitation Programs

Supervised Visitation Programs should be considered when ongoing safety or danger situations exist including:

- When there has been intimate partner violence and the perpetrator continues to pose a danger and/or risk to the caretaker and/or children.
- In sexual abuse cases where danger cannot be mitigated in other ways.
- When there are concerns regarding threats to DCF staff.

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- Any situations that require observation at all times and/or require other safety mechanisms on site which are built into how these programs operate (i.e. separate entries, separate parking areas, delayed arrival times, etc. to assure parents/foster parents don't have contact with each other).

See [Family Services Policy 123, Reviewing Case Plan Decisions](#) for information about the appeal process regarding family contact.

District Director Tasks

- Ensure that Family Time Coaching activities are effective and appropriately supported through the Child and Family Supports grant.

Social Worker Tasks

- Arrange for the initial family time to occur within 3 working days of when the child is placed in out of home care.
- Convene an Initial Caregivers Meeting within 5 working days of a child entering placement or changing placement and subsequent Shared Parenting Meetings at least every 3 months or more frequently.
- Document, using the Initial Caregivers Meeting Form and subsequent Shared Parenting Meeting Forms, the family time plan and share with GALs, attorneys, contracted case managers and/or others that would need this information.
- Participate in one family time per month.